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TRANSMISSION PLANNING GROUP RELEASES PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

CHEYENNE, Wyo. – Preliminary recommendations from a nine-month joint planning process to improve electric transmission in the Rocky Mountain West include four categories of proposed transmission projects.

Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal and then-Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt created the Rocky Mountain Area Transmission Study in fall 2003. Its goal is to identify, through an open and public process, the most critical electric transmission and generation project needs in the Rocky Mountain subregion.

With broad stakeholder involvement, RMATS will provide a framework for regional collaboration to improve the Western interconnection with technical, financial and environmentally viable projects identified for developmental consideration.

The RMATS process includes the states of Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah and Wyoming.

The group's preliminary recommendations include:

- The Montana System Upgrade, which calls for reinforcing the existing 500-kilovolt system without building new transmission, but by increasing the efficiency of existing lines at a relatively low cost. It would allow the addition of significant new wind and coal generation to the existing grid without creating transmission constraints.

- The Bridger Expansion Project, which calls for the addition of a new 345-KV high voltage transmission line in Wyoming from a point near Rawlins, extending west to the Jim Bridger power plant, then separating into two 345-KV lines extending to points further west in Idaho and Utah. This project would enable the addition of significant new coal and wind generation resources in southern Wyoming and southern Idaho. Without the new transmission facility, any new electric generation resources would be bottlenecked by limitations in the existing transmission grid.

-The Wyoming-Colorado Lines Project, which calls for the addition of a new 345-KV line from the Powder River Basin in northeastern Wyoming across the constrained transmission path between Wyoming and Colorado known as TOT3, extending to a point northeast of Denver. As with the other projects, significant new diversified wind and coal resources have been identified which could then reach load centers; in this case, the Colorado Front Range.

-The final RMATS transmission project recommendation is a longer-term power export proposal that would add a major increment of new electric power resources, further increase transmission capacity in the Rocky Mountain states and build two major export transmission paths to West Coast markets.

When Freudenthal and Leavitt announced the formation of RMATS last September, they sought to spur needed investment in new electric transmission lines. After Leavitt's departure to become administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Utah Gov. Olene Walker joined Freudenthal in supporting RMATS and pushing the transmission planning process forward.

"Without such critical investment in new electric transmission facilities, the region will be unable to tap lower cost coal and new wind generation, and it will not be able to export these electric generation resources to other parts of the West where they are needed," Freudenthal said. "RMATS is heading in the right direction by starting the planning process now so that we might be prepared for the future."

There has been very little construction of new electric transmission facilities in the region for the last decade. This reluctance to invest stems in part from the climate of uncertainty surrounding newer developments in federal regulatory policy and the lack of a meaningful national energy policy to address the many changes in the electric power industry over the last decade.

"The future of our region will be determined by water and energy supplies," Walker said. "The best solution is addressing the issue collectively. One of the strengths of the RMATS process is the inclusiveness of the group of stakeholders working together."

Through the coordinated efforts of the diverse RMATS stakeholders, a steering committee and technically oriented work groups, the RMATS initiative has been working to identify specific, high priority, transmission projects which will bring new electric supplies to growing load, make economic sense, and are likely to be feasible to finance due to the benefits they bring to the region and the West.

Both governors said they look forward to reviewing the recommendations at the next stakeholders meeting, planned for September, and beginning the important dialogue around the more formal actions that will be necessary to get the identified projects built.

The RMATS transmission planning report is expected to be completed in late August in anticipation of a stakeholders meeting to be hosted the governors in September. RMATS

is an open and public process. To find out more, please review the RMATS web site at <http://psc.state.wy.us/htdocs/subregional/home.htm>.